

Knowing of your interest in education, I wanted to let you know about a provision tucked into the \$410 billion "omnibus" spending bill that will effectively eliminate an important education initiative in our nation's capital that is giving hope for a solid education to thousands of students who once were confined to failing public schools.

By way of brief background, Washington, D.C. has one of our nation's worst public schools systems, but not because of a shortage of money. The city spends \$14,400 on every child enrolled in public school-more than any state and well above the national average of \$9,300. This means that a student enrolled in a D.C. public school from grades 1 through 12 will have \$172,000 spent on his or her education. Despite this large sum, the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that Washington, D.C.'s fourth and eighth graders scored lower than any other students in the entire nation. Sadly, our nation's capital also has one of the lowest graduation rates in America-59 percent according to one estimate.

With the strong support of Washington's Democratic mayor, Congress established the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program in 2004 to provide children with the opportunity to attend a school of their parents' choosing rather than being forced into a specific neighborhood school that is too often dangerous or academically deficient. This school year, more than 1,900 children are attending private schools using tuition scholarships through this groundbreaking school choice initiative. The program costs less per student than traditional federal programs. More importantly, it is very popular among the parents of participating students, and is starting to make a difference in the academic performance of these students.

Unfortunately, however, the omnibus spending bill that the House just passed includes a provision that requires Congress and the D.C. Council to revisit and reauthorize the program in 2010, instead of allowing it to continue. Many people believe that this move was designed to effectively kill this groundbreaking program, because while there is support for the program at the local level and among many members of Congress, the Democratic majority in the House and Senate is unlikely to provide the necessary support for the program to continue. This is especially disappointing and outrageous considering the fact that several of these same lawmakers choose to send their children to successful private schools in our nation's capital. Educating our nation's young people is incredibly important for the future of our country, and I strongly believe children from lower-income families should have the same opportunity to escape the consequences of failing public schools and enjoy the benefits of a high-quality education provided by better schools.